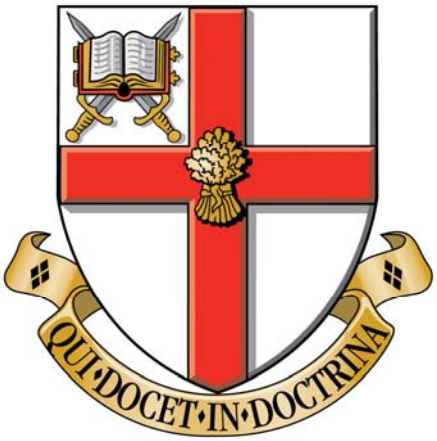

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Beyond introspective reflective learning: externalised reflection on the University of Chester Doctor of Professional Studies programme

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The Doctor in Professional Studies (DProf) is a trans-disciplinary programme at the University of Chester which has been running since March 2010. The programme begins with a compulsory level 7 40 credit module called Personal and Professional Review (PPR) which is an extended exercise in reflective learning. Work based learning tutors at Chester have been facilitating reflective learning for over a decade at Chester but that on PPR marks a significant new development in practice. Reflection in PPR is designed to facilitate reflection across a whole career which is both personal, non-personal and which enables the development of a strategic analysis of practice as the basis for planning research at Level 8. While it is still too early to evaluate the impact on students, this paper sets out the rationale which underpins the approach. In so doing a case is made for a fresh approach to reflective learning at doctoral level.

Keywords: Professional Doctorate, Reflective learning

Context: work based learning and reflective practice at Chester

The University of Chester Doctor of Professional Studies (DProf) programme is a trans-disciplinary programme designed to meet the needs of senior practitioners in a wide variety of fields. In addition to conferring an award its purpose is threefold: to enable the individual to analyse their personal motivations, their role and that of the business they are engaged in; to generate original knowledge of strategic relevance to their own role, organisation or professional/ practice group and to disseminate that and other practice knowledge of strategic relevance as the basis for improvement in practice. It is structured like most UK professional doctorates- 180 credits at NQF level 7 (90 credits ECT at Masters level)/ NQF 360 credits at level 8 (180 ECT credits at Doctoral level) but unlike many other programmes does not allow complete exemption from Level 7 in circumstances where a student possesses a Masters degree. An initial 40 credit module, Personal and Professional Review (PPR) is compulsory and includes an exercise in reflective learning in which learners are encouraged to develop a critical attitude towards their own understanding of the world and develop a strategic and dynamic analysis of their practice by accounting for the external forces which shape their occupational role. This paper describes how this approach to reflective learning is facilitated and the rationale for doing so.

The DProf is situated within the Centre for Work Related Studies (CWRS) which has been engaged in Work Based Learning (WBL) and hence reflective learning since 1998. The mechanism for facilitating such learning is a ‘shell’ framework, the Work Based and Integrative Studies (WBIS) programme. WBIS is designed to deliver flexible learning to adults in employment. There are many theoretical foundations for the underpinning philosophy embedded in WBIS but

perhaps the best summary of its principles in contained in Brookfield (1998). The framework has currently has approximately 1500 learners at levels 4-7, mostly studying individually negotiated pathways and award titles.

WBIS is designed to enable the learner to design their own programme relevant to their working needs and ensure learning is integrated with practice. Students can study modules based around traditional subject disciplines; devise their own modules where there is a need to transcend traditional subject boundaries or where sufficient demand exists tutors develop new modules in response. WBIS modules can be added almost infinitely and there is an internal accreditation process for this purpose to enable rapid development.

As far as is practicable within the framework of the University regulations (and their own best interests) students begin their studies when they like, submit when ready and determine their completion date. All learning is tailored to their needs and as a result virtually no WBIS pathway is the same as another; this only usually happens when an employer negotiates a pathway on behalf of employees. The one element all WBIS students undertake is, at the beginning of their studies, Self Review and Negotiation of Learning. In this module, irrespective of level of learning, students identify their learning achievements to date and review their learning requirements as the basis for identifying their learning pathway. At this stage they also identify opportunities for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) whether Certificated (APCL) or Experiential (APEL). They also complete a formal exercise in reflection, typically using a recognised reflective model.

‘Self Review’ performs a number of functions. First, it encourages the development of personal responsibility for learning based upon

self diagnosed need. Second it sensitises individuals to an explicit view of the learning process and encourages self analysis of learning preferences. Third, it enables individuals to identify learning achievements which can be translated into academic credit. Fourth it facilitates the creation of a practical programme of study and exit award based upon that analysis. Finally it inculcates the notion of reflective practice as the basis not just for the WBIS programme of learning but as the basis of continuing and extended lifelong learning. Within Self Review students complete a formal reflective learning exercise, often based upon critical incident analysis. Thereafter all assignments produced as part of a WBIS programme of study are reflective, with strong emphasis on the application of knowledge. No particular model of reflection is advocated but models which seek to deepen reflection by means of reference to authoritative sources, such as Boud (1995) or Gibbs (1998) are strongly encouraged. Typical WBIS assignments are therefore a reflective commentary on lived experience or perhaps the submission of workplace artefacts (such as reports, charts, notes of meetings and so on) alongside a reflective commentary. The specific requirement of the WBIS programme has created a distinct community of practice among tutors who created and deliver it (Leonard and Talbot 2009). Reflective learning is central to practice and it is from this community that the Professional Doctoral (DProf) programme has been created.

The DProf programme begins at Level 7 with a compulsory 40 credit module entitled Personal and Professional Review (PPR) which performs a similar function to the existing Self Review module on the WBIS programme. Within it students identify learning achievements, the knowledge they intend to generate for Doctoral study and potential opportunities for APL. In addition they are also expected develop a reflective approach to their learning and study. The inculcation of the idea of reflective practice at the beginning of

a professional doctorate programme is not new- it is standard practice in many others (Armsby & Costley 2008; Sambrook and Stewart 2010).

Critical thinking about reflective learning

Developing thinking about the way in which reflective thinking should be facilitated in PPR represented something of a challenge. In addition to the considerable body of tacit knowledge acquired over the years there is a wealth of experience elsewhere and a very large literature upon which to draw summarised in Moon (2008a). It is noticeable that much of the literature (for example on reflective cycles) has been around a decade or so and there is a wider sense, reflected in Bradbury et al (2010) that that it is time for those using reflective learning models to perhaps reflect ourselves on our practice. The DProf has proved to be a vehicle for reflection and adaptation at Chester.

In part the reasons for this are practical. Some students DProf students who have previously been on the WBIS programme have already completed a Self Review module and although PPR is at the same level it is important to give students a sense of progression and development in respect of reflective learning. When designing the programme we simply felt it had to offer a new experience for existing students. So we wished to see progressive reflective learning. A noticeable feature of the literature on reflective learning there is relatively little discussion of progression and levelness although there are exceptions such as Kember et al (1999); Kember et al (2000) and Warhurst (2008). As a result there was little we could find to import ‘off the shelf’ so there had to be a certain amount of thinking from first principles.

Second it is apparent that implicit in our approach, derived in turn from the use of reflective cycles that much reflective learning is predicated upon the assumption of incidents, notably the critical incident (Brookfield 1990). The scope of reflective learning on the DProf is rather more ambitious. The purpose of the programme is to enable students to develop more strategic thinking so it makes little sense to focus on single events in reflective learning. The approach adopted instead encourages reflective thinking about a whole career as the basis for enabling them to understand the broader dynamics which shape the practice they are engaged with. They are therefore encouraged to reflect in a way which combines both internal and personal understanding of lived experience as well as the external, impersonal forces which have created the role they occupy. The usual mechanisms for facilitating reflective learning like reflective cycles are therefore not really appropriate.

The third issue we confronted is related to this as well as to the intellectual journey students make over the course of the programme. Students coming on to professional doctorate programmes rarely do so with fully developed research proposals and we had been informally advised that the attainment of research focus usually occurs over a period of time- typically a year. Given the focus in the programme on developing practice knowledge we encourage students to develop research which anticipates change- that is, knowledge which is essentially future oriented and is therefore able to underpin emergent purposive action. As Wilson (2008) pointedly notes conventional reflective learning tends to be heavily focussed on the past and present rather than thinking about the future. We needed an approach to reflective learning which enables students to understand the dynamics of their role, organisation and wider practice body to form the basis for informed thinking about the research which can underpin emergent practice and as befits doctoral study, is of strategic rather than personal

significance. Without externalisation of the role of the individual it is difficult to see how such a perspective can be developed.

Beyond that we were starting to develop some more critical thinking about the whole process of ‘academicised’ reflective learning. Like Taylor (2003) the issue is not whether reflective learning is appropriate or not but the uncritical way in which it is often advocated, as if personalised narrative accounts are themselves authentic and unproblematic. From our perspective reliance upon individual introspection has four major weaknesses.

The first of these is the extent to which we can regard first person accounts as being truly representative of events in the real world. Reflective writing depends upon a description of circumstances and events by individuals which are impossible to verify for accuracy, leaving the academic assessor with little option but to regard them as representative of real world events. In the literature there is recognition that memory, upon which formal academic reflective learning depends is a highly unreliable instrument (Mackintosh 1998; Newell 1992, Newell 1994, Jones 1995 – all quoted in Taylor 2003). Rigg and Trehan (2008) note how cognitive dissonance may inhibit true accounts of self-reported actions but awareness of the role cognition plays in perception has received relatively little attention in academic debates on reflective learning. Outside of the world of reflective learning there is a plethora of titles which set out to describe the ways in which our habitual ways of thinking lack rationality and prejudice understanding of experiences (such as Arley 2009; Fine 2007; Piatelli and Palmarini 1994; Pohl 2004; Sutherland 2007 and Tavris and Aaronson 2008). Yet the literature on reflective learning literature barely recognises the problem. C*ognitive bias* describes our tendency to make errors of judgement based on cognitive factors- in other words the mistakes we all make in our judgements about the world because of the way in which our

brains work. Or as Levy (1997, p86) expresses it cognitive bias is the collective name for the ‘systematic mistakes that derive from limits that are inherent in our capacity to process information’. Their function appears to be as a kind of way of simplifying complex reality into something we can understand and communicate, possibly as an evolutionary adaptation (Confer et al 2010).

There are numerous empirically verified cognitive biases which are likely to distort reflective accounts. Examples include the *Introspection bias* describes our propensity to believe that our own introspections are unbiased, unlike those of others, which we regard as more likely to be biased. This in turn is based upon our own view of ourselves as being ‘better than average’ in terms of our possession of desirable traits and fewer undesirable traits. This belief in our own superiority is so ingrained that when people are informed of this ‘halo’ effect, their views, beliefs and perceptions are not altered (Pronin and Kugler 2006). Some writers on reflection are aware of this: Carroll et al (2002) note the tendency of much reflective learning to be self-affirming rather than transformative.

Another distorting bias is the *Confirmation bias* which describes the tendency to find information, remember the past or interpret events in ways which supports pre-existing beliefs. In other words our experiences are far more likely to confirm our previously held views and assumptions than alter them (Wason and Johnson Laird 1972). *Hindsight bias* describes the way in which we regard past events as having an inevitability about them which was often not evident at the time. In layman’s terms hindsight bias is being ‘wise after the event’ – over emphasising our ability to foresee future events based on (inaccurate) reflections on the past (Jones 1995; Hoffrage and Pohl 2003). The *Fundamental attribution error* describes our tendency to use personality based explanations for the behaviour of others and under-estimate situational explanations. By contrast we

tend to interpret our own actions in the light of the situations we find ourselves in rather than in terms of our own preferences and beliefs (Ross 1977). There are many other sources of cognitive bias which collectively undermine the idea that reflective accounts are reliable. Reflective learning which does not sensitise learners to the pitfalls of uncorroborated first person accounts of real world events and actions runs the risk of lacking that which we seek to engender-criticality.

The second issue which undermines the ability of learners to critically reflect is the extent to which the idea itself secures engagement by learners. We know from studies of student populations that many adopt learning strategies which are principally designed to gain qualifications rather than engage at a deeper level with learning (Atherton 2011). There is evidence that this also true of some of those on programmes where there is reflective learning. Cavanagh at al (1995) for example found that in a sample of 192, only 46% could be regarded as 'reflective' learners, as defined by Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory. Maclellan's (2004) smaller study evaluated forty highly marked scripts of reflective learning and concluded that all but seven were essentially descriptive rather than critically reflective. The important point to note is that while tutors may have 'buy in', students may be simply compliant or engage in a surface approach to reflective learning, as recently reported in the example trainee teachers did in Tanzania (Ombonya Otienoh 2011).

In reflective writing the problem of student engagement is intensified because of the personalised nature of the learning. Barnett (1997) found that many students simply do not understand what is meant by 'critical reflection' a not altogether surprising conclusion since those who write about it do not appear to agree what is it either (Mackintosh 1998) . Even if it is understood it might

be resisted as being intrusive. Both Hargreaves (2004) and Hobbs (2007) found forced reflective writing for assessment is more likely to produce strategic compliance and even hostility rather than genuinely reflective thinking. Hobbs account is especially interesting as she includes an account of her own experience of being forced to write reflectively and the strategies she employed to get a good grade without revealing what she regarded as personal information.

The third weakness is the inability of most students to contextualise their role, ideas and beliefs. Theorists like Brookfield (1998) claim that reflective learning has the potential to enable students to undermine common sense understandings and even challenge dominant cultural values underpinning actions but there is little empirical evidence that this occurs on any widespread scale. Barnett (1997) conducted a small survey of his own students and concluded that while critical reflection is 'necessary', it is 'on its own an insufficient form of reflection for high levels of critical thought, activity and self transformation' (p103). He concludes that focussing on the actions of the self does not enable students to fully understand the way in which the concepts they use to understand their own actions are in turn, socially constructed…'the students inner self is constructed more by external agendas…than by the students own personal aspirations, values and hold on the world' (p100).
Similar points are made by Brockbank and McGill (1998); Greenwood (1993); Hulah (1995); Pryce (2002) and Taylor (2003) who all argue that most reflective learning is naïve because those undertaking reflection simply do not have the means to interpret the world as it is socially constructed. Some academic tutors such as Fook and Gardner (2007) therefore encourage students to engage in reflective learning which emphasises social context and not just personal experience. In parenthesis it is worth noting their approach

is (unlike the one described here) based around the idea of the critical incident.

The final weakness is the way in which narrative (for which substitute the phrase ‘reflective account’) itself is regarded uncritically as though in every situation there is only one possible construction of events, cause and effect is always understood (and present) and that what is significant in the narrative is also understood. The various reflective models share common characteristics – they begin with an event, are linear, progressive, incorporate notions of cause and effect, end in resolution through action and finally a return to stasis. In other words most of the reflective models obey the rules of narrative. We find narratives compelling but in truth they are mostly verisimilitude - they are not the same as life itself which mostly refuses to conform to cause and effect and resolution (Dershowitz 1998). The important point here is that reflective cycles have no psychological reality, they are social constructs which are a kind of reflective thinking ‘ideal type’ (in the Weberian sense), even if we disregard Dennison’s (2010) observation that they were never intended to be appropriated for academic assignments anyway.

If reflective accounts are regarded as examples of narrative we are less likely to accept them, as tends to occur, at face value. For a social theorist of contemporary society like Giddens (2008) we constantly create narratives of ourselves as a means of identifying who we are. According to this view first person narrative construction comes easily and naturally to us because the fractured nature of post-industrial society has broken down more traditional notions of self (as ‘working class’, ‘doctor’ , ‘wife’ and so on) so that we naturally accept the narratives others construct of themselves. Each of us is therefore our own story so that our perception of

personally constructed narratives appears unproblematic to tutors. As Field (2005) observes our notions of appropriate education and learning are deeply embedded within a particular economic, political and social context. What strikes us as relevant to learning in context blinds us to the artificiality of the constructed mechanisms through which ‘reflective learning’ occurs. That is tutors of reflective learning have their own narrative and ideology in respect of its centrality and relevance.

There is an irony here because another distinguishing feature of our social context is the notion of the contestability of all ideas. If a narrative can be constructed, it can also be deconstructed such that there is no end to the interpretation of experience, there can be no single narrative or objective truth (Derrida 1976). Each reflective account or narrative can be endlessly written and re-re-written and indeed tutors know the variety they can come in, yet we purport to believe their contents as representing some sort of objective social reality.

These kind of insights enable us to see critical reflection in the context of formal academic learning as it really is- a product set within a specific economic context, culturally grounded, socially constructed and psychologically constrained – something which fits into a particular temporal and institutional niche. Reflective learning does not represent the wisdom of ages any more than those approaches to didactic learning it critiques. Indeed its very meaning appears not only contested between individuals but also cultures (Yordanka and Loughran 2009). This is not the same as saying that it has no value but it is best viewed as representing *bounded rationality* (Simon 1957). That is we accept that reflective thinking can and often is rational but that rationality is heavily circumscribed. The thoughts we regard as our own are in fact social constructs created in a particular economic, political and social

context mediated through psychological processes which not only limit our ability to make sense of the world but also define it. We do not see the world the way a Victorian industrialist saw it nor a mill worker. We do not see it the way a peasant in the Indian sub-continent sees it or even in all probability the way a German contemporary sees it. Beyond that it is likely that we will interpret events differently from individuals whom we know very well and who are similarly located spatially, temporally, occupationally, socially and so on. The question therefore arises: how can we develop an approach to reflective learning which recognises the constraints of bounded rationality but which seeks to overcome these limitations and is appropriate as part of a Doctoral programme of study?

Reflective learning in Personal and Professional Review

To summarise, reflective learning on the Professional doctorate has been informed by a critique of existing practice and aims to be

- Progressive in the sense of deepening reflective thinking from previous experiences so facilitating increased depth of understanding of the self
- Enable students to reflect upon a whole life and career and not just critical incidents
- Enable students the space to explore ideas and experience in respect of their practice as they begin to formulate the focus for their doctoral research. The focus should incorporate a dynamic, strategic view of practice which is forward rather than backward looking
- Cognisant of the psychological constraints on personal accounts of experience

- Of personal interest to students without forcing the disclosure of personal information such that the process of reflection is fully engaged with
- Enable students to locate their role and practice within a broader economic, social and political context yet recognise their autonomy and personal beliefs
- Facilitate the ability to construct meaningful narratives of lived experience whilst at the same being aware that narrative itself is socially constructed and as such, can be de-constructed. Alternative narratives of ourselves and our actions are almost limitless.

PPR attempts to achieve all of these objectives in three elements, each of which requires the writing of a linked 2-3000 word assignment. Formative written assessment is provided on drafts and there is a tutorial at the beginning of the process and following the completion of each element. At the outset students are directed to a dedicated online resource where there is specialist reading to prepare them for the module. The reading consists of book extracts and papers linked by narrative. Themes covered include many of those identified here- reflective learning, social constructivism, occupational and social roles in a post industrial economy, post modernism, the construction of narratives, ideology, cognition, organisational theory and so on. There is also specialist materials on critical thinking- 'that mode of thinking- about any subject, context or problem- in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skilfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them" (Paul, Fisher and Nosich 1992, p4). That is thinking about thinking – also sometimes known as metacognition.[1] It is not possible to create perfect beings able to think completely

[1] There is no shortage of texts to direct students to, including Fisher (2001) and Moon (2008b) both of which provide a broad introduction. Others such as Alfaro-Le Fevre (1999); Cottrell (2005); Gould and Baldwin (2004) and Jones-Devitt and Smith (2007) are more practically oriented.

outside social and psychological context but critical thinking as a taught skill has the potential to enable students to develop insight into their own habitual ways of thinking so they can examine their own assumptions.

In Element One students are asked to write a first person account of their life and career to date, ending with their current role. It is recognised that is no single, reflective narrative of a life or career but several. There can be no end to the interpretation of experiences, there is no definitive account (Raggatt 2007). Students are made aware that the extent of personal disclosure is entirely a discretionary matter. Some accounts are highly personal, many are not. Some go back to childhood, others focus on formal career progression. Most accounts are linear and temporal, others more thematic and selective. The other significant variation is the degree of reflective analysis each contains. The majority are largely descriptive. All are highly revealing to the student as well as the tutor and often identify patterns or issues which the student had not been consciously aware previously. Sometimes a single sentence will identify something which will become the focus for doctoral research. This element is assessed on a Pass/Fail basis only.

The second element is an exercise in what we have come to call ‘external reflection’. This requires them to reconstruct how their current occupational role was created and is evolving. This requires the student to understand the nature of their business and organisation. The starting point is often historical but the context is always global and in particular the ways in which occupations are being re-created in response to the globalising forces of competition and relentless pressure to reduce costs (Reich 1992). This is a

complex and demanding task which assumes our understandings of the world are externally constructed, reflecting the dominant economic, social and political imperatives of our time (Berger and Luckman 1966). To understand what this might mean in practice we can take the example of someone working in Higher Education. Not only would the student be expected to understand the way HE systems have evolved globally but also the specific way it has evolved in the UK and how it is continuing to evolve, as well demonstrating an understanding of the way their own institution has developed within that broader pattern.

The purpose is to enable the student to understand how their personal journey set out in Element One coincides with economic, social, cultural and political forces external to themselves so that they can develop a strategic, dynamic view of their organisation and role. It is at this point when students engage in extensive reading that they begin to develop ideas about the way they would like their research to develop.

Element three builds on the two previous elements by asking students to formally identify where they see their career and challenges for practice developing, set out a compatible learning pathway (as well as negotiated award title) for the programme and identify the likely focus for practice research at doctoral level. Again it is easiest to demonstrate this by reference to an example in Higher Education. A senior manager in a University, building upon the previous analysis of their institution in the broader scheme of things, might develop a focus which considers its strategic direction or concentrates on an aspect of that development, such as an investigation into what a development programme for senior managers might consist of.

Following the completion of PPR students complete Level 7 by, in most cases by an APL claim- usually including Certificated and Experiential learning.

Discussion

This paper has outlined what are seen as limitations in reflective learning and described attempts to overcome them on the Chester DProf. It is not claimed that the practices described here bring the idea of reflective learning as bounded rationality to an end rather than it is an approach which aims to inform students of the limitations of assumed rationality in reflective thinking. It also seeks to empower students to contextualise their role and actions as the basis for a more dynamic view of practice. The critique of academic reflective learning underpinning the approach is universalist but pedagogical practice described here is specific to a particular context- on a DProf programme. Doctoral learning of any description necessarily involves a degree of breadth and depth of learning coupled with a high degree of intellectual challenge which may be inappropriate at other levels on other programmes. Reflective learning on a doctoral programme *should* be more challenging than on other programmes.

Attempting to identify and deal with problems associated with reflective learning is not the same thing as overcoming them and in a sense it is hard to know whether we have been successful. Understanding the impact on the learner of any educational programme is challenging and it is too early for a formal evaluation. To get some idea of the module from a student perspective all of those who have completed it were asked to supply their views on the draft and seven kindly did so. All the comments were positive and I have selected comments from the four who focussed on the experience of reflective learning in the module:

Student A commented:

“(the module)..has assisted me to think more critically and this is evidenced in the way I engage with my clients...it has forced me to consider what is happening ‘out there’ globally and how my clients from various professions including nursing, teaching, accounting and retail are being affected by the current state of the economy. It has afforded me the ability to consider multiple options regarding solutions to service-user problems and to proffer these to clients.”

Student B commented:

“Critical reflecting on the context of my role from a strategic and dynamic viewpoint is something that I have found to be far harder than I could have imagined. One tends to see oneself in terms of past lived experiences rather like a cog in giant mechanism that just fits in. Having to look beyond your own personal objectives and experiences to see how you became part of the system is hard enough, but then you also have to consider how one might help to drive forward your industry and it forces you to think independently”

Student C commented:

“I feel undertaking the programme has enabled me to deconstruct my previous knowledge and reconstruct new concepts and knowledge by developing my personal insight from wider and deeper perspectives. The modules so far have required me to reposition my personal location in the workplace and begin to start the process of becoming a practitioner researcher. This journey will enable me to apply research and best practice reflexively in my area of practice. I feel I have begun a journey of self discovery with a search for new knowledge which has ultimately changed my understanding and demystified research. “

Finally Student D commented:

"As a student with previous experience of reflective learning I was reasonably comfortable with the prospect of beginning a professional doctorate programme with a unit entitled Personal and Professional Review. That was until I discovered what the unit *actually* comprised of. I realised that, quite simply, I was being asked to deconstruct my world view, and then to rebuild it over the course of three essays.

The first element allowed me to revisit times past and decisions that I had filed away in the deepest recesses of my mind. When I took my first ever temporary job why had some of my colleagues stored

bottles of vodka in their pigeon holes, and why did they need them to get through the day? What made me turn down a job driving trains to become a junior advisor on drugs policy at the Department of Health? Why hadn't I seriously engaged with higher education when I was 18, and what made me so determined to start afresh in my mid twenties?

The second element was incredibly challenging intellectually, but also hugely rewarding. It meant examining what lay behind the decisions I had made, how my fundamental world view underpinned my thought processes and how my actions in turn shaped my perceptions. Baudrillard and friends took me to the hinterland, and for a while all I knew was that I knew nothing. But I found a way back and the return journey made me realise the twinned virtues and dangers of the social constructs that we all rely on.

The third element meant creating a plan for my future studies (and indeed career) which was laid on those foundations. I suspect most professional doctorate students will be attempting a type of practitioner research which is intrinsically linked to their everyday working lives. The innovative design of the personal and professional review unit allows an increased awareness of the self, which is absolutely critical for an embedded researcher, who may have deeply entrenched views. I hope that what I have learnt at the start of my doctoral studies will mean that my place in the world is of benefit, rather than detriment, to my future research."

These comments are extremely encouraging from a tutor perspective although they cannot be construed to represent the views of everyone. Nonetheless it seems for some at least the approach to reflective learning described here does help to facilitate deeper, critical thinking as intended.

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